

# learning to share

Taking turns is tough for young kids, but these strategies will help your child be less possessive.

by LESLIE GARISTO PFAFF

To a toddler, nothing increases a toy's value more than another child's desire to play with it. "After all, sharing is not a natural impulse for toddlers," says Richard Dauber, Ph.D., a child psychologist in Parsippany, New Jersey. Even though it may be several years before your child is empathetic enough to take turns, that shouldn't prevent you from teaching her the basics of sharing now—as long as you observe a few simple rules.

toddler  
1-2 years



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### don't force it

Reprimanding your child or wresting a toy away and giving it to a playmate won't convince her to be generous in the future. In fact, these tactics may have the opposite effect, and make her cling to her possessions even more tightly. "It's normal to have a difficult time sharing at this age, and it's important to recognize that your child isn't being 'bad' because she's reluctant to do so," says Dr. Dauber. Unless she's being physically aggressive toward a peer or her frustration is causing her to melt down, step back and see whether she and her pal can work it out themselves. If not, redirect their attention to

you like to share my string cheese?" When he's eating a banana, ask if he'll let you have a bite. "Connect the concept with good, positive feelings," suggests Susanne Ayers Denham, Ph.D., a developmental psychologist at George Mason University, in Fairfax, Virginia. For instance, you can say, "I'm so glad you're sharing your sand toys with me. Playing together is so much fun."

### keep favorite objects aside

Your toddler likely has a few treasured playthings that she won't part with for any reason. That's perfectly fine at this stage, so stash them when other kids are around. "Tell your child, 'We're going to

### start swapping

One reason sharing is challenging for toddlers is that they don't understand that letting someone else use a toy doesn't mean saying goodbye to it forever. Help your child realize that sharing is a temporary thing by practicing trading items with him. Patrice Tartt, of Woodbridge, Virginia, tried this with her then 2-year-old son, Bron. One day when they were alone, she pulled out two trucks and explained that they would each play with one for a while and then switch. "It made him realize that when he gave up a toy, he'd get it back later," says Tartt.

Once your toddler has mastered the art of swapping with you, see whether he'll do the same thing on a playdate. If he balks at trading, ask if his friend can see the toy when he's done. "You'll be surprised at how often a toddler will say yes when you use this approach," says Heather Shumaker, author of *It's OK Not to Share ... And Other Renegade Rules for Raising Competent and Compassionate Kids*. While your child's pal may not be happy to wait for his turn, a few reassuring words ("It's hard to be patient. As soon as he's done, it will be your turn") should ease his pain.

### praise her progress

Toddlers frequently engage in "proto-sharing"—letting someone else look at a possession while maintaining a firm grip. "This stage comes as early as 1 year to 18 months," notes Dr. Bober. When you notice your child doing this,